

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 04929 311122Z
ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 ACDA-12 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-08 NRC-05 SOE-02 DODE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 557

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 4929

FOLLOWING RECD FROM BOMBAY DATED MARCH 30, BEING RPTD
TO YOU

QUOTE

CONFIDENTIAL BOMBAY 792

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PARM
SUBJ: INDIAN NUCLEAR TESTING

1. THE FREE PRESS GROUP OF BOMBAY NEWSPAPERS CONTINUED
ITS RUN OF SPECULATIVE NUCLEAR STORES IN PAST TWO DAYS.
AFTERNOON FREE PRESS BULLETIN OF MARCH 29 FEATURED AN
ACROSS TOP OF FRONT PAGE HEADLINED "ELECTION BOOST THAT
DIDN'T COME OFF. INDIRA HAD PLANNED A SECOND BOMB BLAST."
MARCH 30 EDITION OF MORNING FREE PRESS JOURNAL CARRIED
SAME STORY ON PAGE 5 WITH SIMILAR HEADLINE. BOTH STORIES
WERE BYLINED RAMACHANDRAN, WHO HAS A POOR REPUTATION FOR
ACCURACY.

2. FREE PRESS STORIES IN ESSENCE CLAIM THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER
THE JANUARY 1977 CALL FOR ELECTIONS MRS. GANDHI INSTRUCTED
DEPARTMENT OF ATOMIC ENERGY TO PREPARE FOR A SECOND BLAST.
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 04929 311122Z

FREE PRESS SAYS EXPLOSION WAS SCHEDULED FOR EARLY MARCH 1977
TO PRECEDE ELECTIONS BY ABOUT TWO WEEKS. IT DIDN'T COME OFF,
ACCORDING TO FREE PRESS, BECAUSE METEOREOLOGICAL CONDITIONS WERE
NOT SUITABLE. STORY INSISTS, HOWEVER, THAT THE TEST
WOULD HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT IN APRIL 1977 HAD MRS.
GANDHI WON ELECTIONS.

3. COMMENT: KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES HERE HAVE STEADFASTLY MAINTAINED THAT MRS. GANDHI HAD CONCLUDED LONG AGO THAT INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CLIMATE IS NOT FAVORABLE TO A SECOND INDIAN EXPLOSION. PEOPLE WE HAVE TALKED WITH AFTER APPEARANCE OF THESE STORIES SAY THEY ARE POPPYCOCK AND PRODUCTS OF THE FREE PRESS EFFORTS TO INCREASE CIRCULATION UNDER ITS NEW EDITOR GOPAL KRISHNA.

4. ONE CONTACT WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE SPOKEN TO MRS. GANDHI QUITE RECENTLY ABOUT NUCLEAR AFFAIRS SAYS THIS STORY IS DIAMETRICALLY AT ODDS WITH HER CURRENT POSITION ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE. HE COMMENTS THAT SHE HAS STOOD MUTE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES IN THE FACE OF WHAT SHE WOULD NORMALLY REGARD AS PROVOCATIONS REQUIRING RETORT. HE CLAIMS TO HAVE ASKED HER DIRECTLY WHY SHE DID NOT DEFEND HERSELF DIRECTLY AGAINST MORARJI CHARGES OF IRRESPONSIBILITY IN CONDUCTING THE FIRST TEST. HER RESPONSE WAS THAT INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE HAS TURNED VERY MUCH AGAINST TESTING AND IS EVEN FORCING SUPER POWERS TO REVIEW THEIR OWN TESTING POLICIES. A PRO-TEST POSITION WOULD DRAW MUCH CRITICISM OUTSIDE INDIA WHEN THERE IS LITTLE TO GAIN FROM FURTHER TESTING. THE GAINS FOR INDIA FROM THE FIRST TEST WOULD NOT BE REINFORCED BY A SECOND TEST BECAUSE THEY WERE ESSENTIALLY ONE-TIME BENEFITS. THIS CONTACT BELIEVES THAT INDIRA
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 04929 311122Z

FORESEES AN EARLY RETURN TO POWER AND WANTS A RECORD THAT LEAVES HER FREE TO TAKE A LEADING ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL DRIVE TO ABOLISH NUKLEAR WEAPONS.

5. CONGEN WOULD OBSERVE THAT MOST PEOPLE HERE ARE PERPLEXED AS TO WHY MRS. GANDHI HAS NOT SPOKEN OUT ON NUCLEAR AFFAIRS. THE ABOVE EXPLANATION IS THE MOST PLAUSIBLE ONE WE HAVE HEARD.

6. WE WOULD ALSO NOTE THAT OUR SCIENTIST CONTACTS HAVE NOT EVEN PRIVATELY BEMOANED ABSENCE OF MEETING. THEY ARE MUCH MORE UPSET BY WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS A SLOWDOWN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BREEDER REACTOR AND OF REPROCESSING WHICH THEY REGARD AS ESSENTIAL FOR BREEDER TECHNOLOGY BECAUSE OF PRESSURES FROM THE ADVANCED COUNTRIES.
COURTNEY UNQUOTE
GOHEEN

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